

27 May 1994

AWCAB

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MEMORANDUM FOR RECORD

SUBJECT: Strategic Staff Ride

1. Conducted the strategic staff ride 25-26 May 1994. Participating in the ride were the ten students enrolled in the advanced course elective with Dr. Jay Luvaas and myself acting as staff ride directors.

2. Departed Carlisle Barracks, 0700 hours 25 May, on a 28 passenger bus with a driver from the transportation motor pool.

3. Itinerary:

- Departed south on Interstate highway 81 to Winchester, Virginia, where we stopped to inspect the old star-shaped earthworks which were a part of the Winchester defenses. While stopped, we discussed the strategic significance of Winchester to both the North and the South throughout the Civil War and in particular, its significance during the period 1862-1863.

- From Winchester we proceeded south east on highway 50 to Ashby's Gap. We stopped at Paris, Virginia to look for Stonewall Jackson's headquarters, established there after the Antietam Campaign. While there we discussed Lee's strategy for the coming months, alternatives for Union offensives, and the relationship between strategy and geography. Also discussed was the role of geography in facilitating communications (peaks and passes, railroads and roads, fords and rivers).

- From Paris we drove south on state highway 50 to Warranton and from there south on state highway 17 toward Fredericksburg. We followed the route Burnside used to move the Army south from Maryland to position it for the drive on Richmond via Fredericksburg. At Fredericksburg we drove north on I95 to the Stafford exit, taking it toward Aquia landing. At the Aquia landing we reviewed Burnside's strategic plans and discussed the importance of Aquia landing and logistics.

- From Aquia landing we drove to Fredericksburg and stopped at the Lacy House. From the vantage point overlooking the river we discussed Burnside's concept of attack for the battle of Fredericksburg. Of particular value was a reading from General Warren on the topography up and down river. Fredericksburg and the river for roughly 10 miles south and 20 miles north constitutes the only practicable crossing sites in the region, considering roads, railroads and fords. An overview of the December 1862 battle was provided for the benefit of those who had not previously been to the battlefield. We drove over to the visitors center at Maryes Heights and gave everyone a chance to visit the bookstore and walk the sunken road.

- We then drove along the Confederate defensive lines at Fredericksburg and climbed Lee's hill to overlook the battlefield, inspecting the artillery epaulments on the hill in the process. At Lee's hill we took advantage of the park service strategic maps to discuss an overview of both the Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville campaigns. We then drove out to the south east end of the Confederate lines where we discussed Jackson's role in the battle of Fredericksburg. While there we took the opportunity to inspect some of the Confederate lines thrown up by Jackson in January 1863 as examples of the evolving doctrine of trench warfare. Enroute to the hotel we stopped by Wilcox's zig-zag trenches on the extreme northern end of the Confederate line. These unique trenches were a highlight for everyone on the ride.

- On the morning of the second day, 26 May, we started the day with a discussion of Hooker's Chancellorsville Campaign, operational concept, strategic importance, and general outcome. As a part of this discussion, we reflected on Lee's actions during the period June 1862 through July 1863, and how for the entire year Lee was on the strategic offensive except when forced by circumstances to conduct an operational pause. It was during an operational pause after Antietam that Burnside attacked him at Fredericksburg in December 1862, and during a similar pause in May of 1863 that Hooker launched his offensive. Throughout this time Lee was planning and preparing to continue offensive operations in Maryland and Pennsylvania, evidenced by map making, assembly of pontoon trains, and reorganizations of the Army.

- The first stop on day 2 was Banks Ford. At the ford we discussed Hooker's concept of the operation, and Lee's response. We discussed the operational and strategic significance of fords, strategic intelligence and the operational art (Wilcox). We inspected the Confederate defenses at the ford and chanced onto the opportunity to inspect some artillery emplacements on private land (Noble's) which were exceptionally well preserved.

- From Banks ford we drove via the River Road to U.S. ford. Enroute we stopped to inspect Union entrenchments at Mineral Springs. These well-hidden earth works are in exceptional condition but so out of the way, they are seldom seen by anyone. U.S. ford, the major crossing point for the bulk of Hooker's forces, was a particularly important stop. We were able to inspect the ford, which is remarkably preserved, and the remnants of the old canal which bordered the river (and one of the old locks). We discussed Hooker's plans (logistics, intelligence-balloons, command and control, and generalship). From the ford we drove to the Chancellorsville visitors center for an operational overview of the battle. From the visitors center we traced Jackson's famous flank march culminating with the attack on Howard's corps. During the march we discussed the merits of Lee's defensive plans and the qualities of generalship which made Lee great: boldness, intellect, and vision.

- From Chancellorsville we drove west to Clark's mountain. The mountain is a strategic vantage point east of the Blue ridge mountains. From the observation point atop the mountain, Lee's observers were able to monitor the movements of Union armies moving south throughout the war. On a clear day, observers on Clark's mountain could see all the way to Culpeper, some 15 miles away.

- From Clark's mountain we drove to Culpeper, on to Warranton and returned to Carlisle retracing the route we had taken south the day before. During the return drive we discussed the merits of the ride and the things we saw over the two days. The general consensus in the group was that the ride had been enjoyable and worthwhile, in large measure because of the meticulous and extensive preparations made beforehand. Participants had read nearly a thousand pages of correspondence and information about the campaigns and participated in eight hours of seminar discussion in preparation for the ride. All agreed that the extensive knowledge of the staff ride leaders was the critical factor which ensured success in the execution phase of the ride. The high level of interest in the material and the strategic staff ride concept within the group was also an important ingredient in the overall success of the two-day ride.

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